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ABSTRACT

Studies have traced a possible link between patterns of family interaction, faulty socialization, child abuse, and delinquent behavior. Counselors can respond to the needs of society to reduce violence by their access to the research on human development and in their work with families and children. Some types of discipline and parental attitudes are more effective than others in forestalling antisocial behavior. Firm, consistent, warm role models who show how to communicate verbally during times of conflict and stress are important. Both parents must agree to use no violence and to share authority in the family. Good communication skills, such as active listening and family negotiations, should be taught and modeled. Children must be taught how to reduce stress, how to think about their thoughts, how to exercise self-control, and how to generate alternative ways of responding to conflicts. (A table of suggestions to eliminate violence is included which outlines the need for sexual equality, health protection, interpersonal skill training, social action, treating others with dignity, changes in laws, and providing experiences with nurturant adults for children.) (NRB)

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Delinquency, Child Abuse, and Suggestions to Stomp Out Violence

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Studies over many decades have traced a possible link between patterns of family interaction, faulty socialization, child abuse and delinquent behavior.

Part of the function of parenting is the transmission of a moral code of behavior. But, prosocial motives are missing in persons with antisocial personalities. Faulty socialization, or the lack of appropriate developmental experiences resulting in little or no conscience development; a drive for immediate gratification; and inability to achieve intimate relationships, is related to antisocial behavior (Coleman, 1964). On the other hand, Samenow (1984) describes the development of a criminal mind in children whose parents have tried their darnedest. What all acting-out behavior boils down to is that an individual always has a choice whether or not to act out: A cruel family, low socioeconomic condition or abuse does not invariably predict acting out. In any case, antisocial behavior crosses all social classes and the exact numbers of antisocial persons are hard to estimate. Onset is found in childhood, seldom beginning in adulthood.

Abuse in childhood tends to increase the likelihood that as the teens are reached, more violent acts will be committed probably due to modeling. Juvenile delinquency itself has been found to occur at a rate five times higher for maltreated children than among the normal teenaged population in one New York county (Cunningham, 1983). Abuse also crosses all social classes. It is important that this point be recognized, for only if all social classes are affected is Congress interested in bills that impinge upon the sacrosanct American family (Child Abuse, Atlantic Monthly, 1983). Still, data from the 1979 National Incidence Study revealed that children from poor families (income under $7,000) were more likely to be victims (42 percent of those in the study), even admitting that hospitals and physicians

were less likely to report higher income families. In addition Gil (1970) reported that women were more likely to be abusers. Explanations range from critiques that data are biased on single parent families which tend to be headed by women, that reports merely reveal prejudice against women, and that women are with children more hours.

In one extensive survey by Straus and Gelles, by their estimates physical attacks in a one-year period of time were made on 6.5 million children living with both parents, out of 46 million. Children were stabbed, beaten, kicked, and threatened. Moreover, about 6,000 out of the 100,000 parents were estimated to use more serious types of violence on each other (probably underreported because so many people think it all right for a man to hit a spouse or children - but not the boss) (Yahraes, Straus, & Gelles, 1979).

Counselors tend to have a worldview, to care about what eventual product will come out of the educational systems and to provide a link between needs of society to reduce violence on the one hand and, on the other hand, all the research concerning effective development (Farson, 1954; Hobbs, 1958). For example, guilt arousal from empathic distress and/or reparation helps extend understanding of others and sometimes results in self-examination and reordering of selfish values particularly by adolescents (Hoffman, 1979). Counselors can help young people examine the effect their actions have on others. In work with families and clients, counselors can help stomp out violence.

Families: Training

Some types of discipline and parental attitudes are more effective than others in forestalling antisocial behavior. Firm, consistent, warm models who show how to communicate verbally during times of conflict and stress are important. Recognizing that conflict is a part of all life, couples should

agree that "there will be no violence in this family," and that authority will be shared by both adults, not vested in the male (Yahraes, Straus, & Gelles, 1979). Until equality is reached, some women will defer discipline to men ("wait 'til your father gets home"), remain passive while men abuse their children - including sexual abusiveness, and abdicate responsibility as the responsible adult women they are.

Bowlby (1979) has described the "attachment" behavior between primary caregiver and child that is so important to adult mental health and to the ability to establish relationships with others. In infancy, the components of attachment behavior between child and caregiver are close bodily contact (how held, not how long); sensitivity to infant signal and response; face-to-face interactions; and sensitive substitute parenting (Ainsworth, 1979). The child's environment should be safe and accessible, the parents should be available to converse with the child at the moment needed, and the parents must set clear limits (distraction, physical removal, verbal restrictions). The child from such an environment forms attachments with primary and secondary caregivers, and then is free to terminate the attachment and explore. Bowlby estimated that about two-thirds of the youngsters in the United States and Britain come from homes fostering attachment behavior.

Where learning is significant in the development of childhood aggression, parents and other adults have to be helped to identify what supports maladaptive behavior, and to reward acceptable behavior (Prestwich & Patterson, 1979). Good communication skills, such as active listening and family negotiations, should be taught and modeled (Corfman & Blechman, 1979; Moore & Guerney, 1979).

Unfortunately, our society has a persistent belief in "Spare the rod, spoil the child" and its antithesis, "permissiveness." Both systems can

create monsters. With the family as an inviolate unit in our society, the best we can do is keep talking and writing in mass media about components of positive development; continue serving as models for active listening behaviors; and keep training young people (including use of cross-age tutoring) for parenthood.

Students: Training

"Tension" is found in study after study of behaviorally disordered students. Structured and varied activities can teach responsibility and commitment (Neely, 1982; Schwartz, 1976). Young people and adults can learn to reduce stress and tension through vigorous physical activity and relaxation exercises (Hilyer, Wilson, Dillon, Caro, Jenkins, Spencer, Meadows, & Booker, 1982). Sublimating physical tension through physical labor is another acceptable channel. Physical cues that tension is building can be taught to even young children as shown in several reports in volumes of the Proceedings of the Biofeedback Research Society.

In addition, children can be taught how to think about their thoughts consciously (Flavell, 1979). That is, a person can figure out the source of the appeal of a particular message, one's own biases and experiences, and what strategies work for dealing with the source. This is important to help adolescent males grow beyond adolescent machismo, performing for peers and parents aggressive, acting-out behaviors. Females are people and individuals - not objects for male use.

Certain of the behavioral techniques have, in recent years, focussed on teaching self-control. One example of self-instruction training is that of an adult solving a particular problem by thinking aloud about the problem, the possible solutions, and decisions made while engaged in solving the problem (Kendall & Finch, 1976). Then the child carries out the same process. Also,

children can learn to generate alternative ways of behaving to conflicts (Kazdin, 1979). They can learn to scoff at bullies. They must learn they do make a choice on choosing a certain behavior. No "poor" background makes a person commit a violent act.

Kohlberg (1980) and colleagues have found that higher levels (e.g., law and order, social contract, universal ethical orientations) of moral development can be taught, but Gilligan (1982) argues that moral development in females involves different considerations than that of males. Females place an emphasis upon how personal relationships are affected by an act. As moral development measurement is developed for females, perhaps we will have better results to report than that adolescents - and females - are stuck at Stage 3 (a la Kohlberg).

A sturdy, tough professional framework for advancing civilized behavior on our planet must begin with intervention in infancy with the segment of our society that steps to a violent drummer. The young must be helped to grow beyond adolescent behavior. We can whistle while we work on this long range view by summarizing the above several suggestions (shown in Table 1).

Since conflicts do occur in human endeavor, let's channel our energetic aggressive behavior toward stomping out violence, serving as a consistent model of philosophy decrying violence, and demonstrating in personal, professional, and public ways that violence toward others can be eliminated.

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Table 1

WE WILL STOMP OUT VIOLENCE

We will not tolerate denigration of daughters in order to worship sons. As adults, women must be treated as responsible agents. LAUD A DAUGHT.

Health protection will be promulgated through sexuality education, preschool screening, sports games, and work outlets, use of symbolic words, and tension reduction through respite, relaxation and biofeedback. DRAIN THE STRAIN.

Interpersonal skills will be taught, including empathy for other's positions, active listening, morally internalized responsibility in a democratic society, and thinking about what we're thinking and doing. USE CUES AND CLUES.

Social action to reduce violence will be our personal charge. Conflicts will occur but WE WILL NOT BE A VIOLENT FAMILY; I WILL NOT BE A VIOLENT PERSON.

Treatment of people in our families, work, and social groups will be compassionate so that all humans are treated with dignity. DIGNIFY TO SIGNIFY.

Laws will be changed by our representatives to enhance equality in the economic and political arenas and reduce poverty and powerlessness. DEMAND INALIENABLE RIGHTS.

Experiences of our young will be with nurturant adults, to teach them cooperation and enhance attachment behaviors to provide new content for social tendencies of our species. LITTLE KID-LETS HAVE BIG EARS.

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